

TREVELYAN - DE HAERETICO COMBURENDO.

DE
HAERETICO COMBURENDO

OR

The Ethics of Religious Conformity

BY

G. M. TREVELYAN

LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED TO "THE HERETICS"

IN OCTOBER, 1913

PUBLISHED FOR THE SOCIETY BY

W. HEFFER AND SONS, LTD., CAMBRIDGE
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL AND CO., LTD., LONDON

1914

Price SIXPENCE Net

1682
264-559 / DE

HAERETICO COMBURENDO

OR

The Ethics of Religious Conformity

BY

G. M. TREVELYAN

LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED TO "THE HERETICS"

IN OCTOBER, 1913

PUBLISHED FOR THE SOCIETY BY

W. HEFFER AND SONS, LTD., CAMBRIDGE
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL AND CO., LTD., LONDON

1914

BL2780

.T8

The following addresses delivered before The Heretics have also been published in pamphlet form and may be obtained from any Cambridge bookseller, or from the Secretary :—

- ° *Dare to be Wise*, by Dr. J. E. McTaggart.
- ° *Heresy and Humanity*, by Miss J. E. Harrison.
- ° *The Future of Religion*, by G. Bernard Shaw.
- ° *A Reply to Mr. Shaw*, by G. K. Chesterton.
- ° *Religion in the University*, by F. M. Cornford.
- *Modern Morality and Modern Toleration*, by E. S. P. Haynes.
- ° *Unanimism*, by Miss J. E. Harrison.
- The Philosophy of Bergson*, by the Hon. Bertrand Russell.
- The Historicity of Jesus*, being a debate on the Christ-Myth Controversy between J. M. Robertson, M.P., and H. G. Wood, M.A.

In addition, the following papers read before the Society have been printed in periodicals :—

- The Primitive Conception of Death*, by Dr. W. H. R. Rivers. (*Hibbert Journal*, 1912).
- The Problem of an Effective Lay Moral Education*, by Harrold Johnson (*International Journal of Ethics*, 1912).
- The Creation of Taste*, by Holbrook Jackson (*English Review*, 1913).



COMMITTEE.

<i>President :</i>	A. S. FLORENCE (Newnham College).
C. K. OGDEN (Magdalene College).	
<i>Treasurer :</i>	C. THORNE (Clare College).
W. L. SCOTT (Clare College).	
<i>Secretary :</i>	H. B. USHER (Trinity Hall).
P. SARGANT FLORENCE	
(Caius College).	A. L. GARDINER (Caius College).

EXTRACT FROM THE LAWS.

2. That the object of the Society be to promote discussion on problems of Religion, Philosophy, and Art.
4. Membership of the Society shall imply the rejection of all appeal to Authority in the discussion of religious questions.

Philos.

DE HAERETICO COMBURENDO.

An Address delivered in Cambridge to "The Heretics."

As some of you may have divined, I do not propose to read an historical treatise on the famous^d and amiable statute 2 H. IV. cap. 15, the name of which I have chosen for the title of my paper. I propose rather to examine, "in the light of present-day conditions," as the newspapers say, the general conception that underlay that old statute, namely the assumption that every one is morally bound to believe the prevailing religious doctrines of the society in which he lives, and that if he does not really believe them he ought at least to conceal his thoughts. This view is still very widely held, though the controversy is less ardent than it was temp. Henry IV. I want, therefore, to discuss the ethics of religious conformity as applied to our own individual cases, to show that the demand made on many of us unbelievers, whether at the University or elsewhere, that we should conform, or at least that we should conceal our opinions, is one that we ought to resist in the interest alike of society and of religion itself. And, finally, I wish to warn you against the danger that this spirit of intolerance (or at least of *odium theologicum*) may come to pervade your own minds by reaction against the intolerance of others. I think we ought to stand up for ourselves, but I do *not* think that we ought to regard the orthodox as separated from us by an impassable barrier. For religious opinions are really only a very small part of life. It is a person's character and personality, not his or her

opinions, that matter to other people. For my part, I confess it, that has been my discovery mainly since I left College. Probably most of you, perhaps all of you, are already as wise on that point as I am now. I daresay people here are more sensible than they used to be. But when I was at Cambridge there was a good deal of intolerance and mutual bitterness. The belief in some quarters that heretics were intolerable bred in others the belief that Christians were despicable. Both were lamentable errors springing from the same evil root—the spirit of *De haeretico comburendo*. In a healthy society mutual relations are extremely little affected by religious opinions. Christians and non-Christians, we must all learn to recognise that an ever increasing variety of religious experience and belief is the rule of the modern world, that we have got to live side by side as friends, and that nothing save bad old traditions inherited from the middle ages makes difference of religious opinion a bar to friendship, even close friendship. My exhortation to you to-night is, *first* to stand up for your rights of conscience and practice as matters of course, and not of favour, and, *secondly*, to be friends with those who believe more than you do and not to think that a barrier divides us from the orthodox. So far from being contradictory, these two duties are parts of one duty. For only where freedom of conscience is completely recognised as a matter of course, not of tolerance, only there are friendship and peace possible.

Religious peace is distantly in sight in this country,—it has not yet wholly come because toleration is not yet complete. But it is in sight. It has been purchased for us by the blood of martyrs, men who died friendless and unhonoured that we might have liberty. Before I begin to speak of the present age, I wish to remind you how far and by what stages we have travelled, in order that we may have great hope for the future.

William Sawtre was the first victim of the statute (by no means the first victim of the spirit) of *De Haeretico Comburendo*. He was burnt alive because he taught that “after the consecration by the priest there remaineth true bread.”

Honour the memory of William Sawtre. He was a poor solitary man, but he was not afraid to die that we might be free.

The generations went by and in the days of the Spanish Armada the great ones of our land had come to think as William Sawtre had thought, touching that strange piece of bread. Poor burnt William Sawtre's doctrine had become endowed and established. So far had things moved, but no further. For I read in Stowe's Chronicle, under the year 1583 :—

“On the 15th day of September, John Lewes, an obstinate heretic, denying the godhead of Christ, and holding divers other detestable heresies, was burned at Norwich.”

John Lewes had no party to celebrate his death as a martyrdom; no hopeful prospect even of “appealing to posterity” such as cheered Ridley and Latimer in their last agony. John Lewes deserves our thanks.

Then two hundred years passed, and the age of Voltaire and Gibbon came and went, and still the views which John Lewes had held brought men in this country to ruin, though no longer to the stake. Men suffered imprisonment and ruin for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason*, a work advocating Deism, as against the Atheism then prevalent in France, and the Biblical literalism then almost universal in England. In our own day we have reached the last stages of legal persecution, in the application of the Blasphemy Laws in cases only where the “Christian doctrines are attacked by poor and more or less uneducated persons in language which may be described as coarse and offensive.” These laws, the Protestant version of the *De Haeretico Comburendo* statute, would, if properly enforced, put a surprising number of the dons of Cambridge into gaol, but “as now administered they simply penalise bad taste and place disabilities upon uneducated freethinkers.” “If,” as Professor Bury says, men like Dr. Nicola, “offend their audience so far as to cause a disturbance, they should be prosecuted for a breach of public

order, not because their words are blasphemous. A man who robs or injures a church . . . is not prosecuted for sacrilege but for larceny or malicious damage, or something of the kind." *

Meanwhile, it is permitted to a Christian magistrate to insult all those of his fellow-countrymen who do not believe as he does, by announcing from the magisterial bench that they are "incapable of speaking the truth" even on ordinary subjects not connected with theology. "Dr. Nicola" in his wildest ravings never said anything as vulgarly offensive as the following utterance of Captain Mitford's, which I transcribe from the *Daily Citizen*, November 20th, 1913:—

"Refusal by the chairman of the Bench to take the word of a man who said he did not believe in God led to the adjournment of a case of alleged trespassing in search of game at Morpeth Police Court yesterday.

"The defendant, a Longhurst miner, named William Snowball, elected to give evidence, but refused to be sworn on the Testament, saying he was a Secularist.

"Captain Mitford (the chairman): 'Don't you believe in God?'

"The Defendant: 'I don't know what God is.'

"Captain Mitford: 'Miserable man! I refuse to take the word of a man who does not believe in God.'

"Mr. Shaw (solicitor for the defendant): 'Do your worships think he is not capable of speaking the truth?'

"Captain Mitford: 'I don't believe him.'

"Mr. Shaw: 'Snowball does not believe in the Testament.'

"Captain Mitford: '*No man is capable of speaking the truth who is such a fool as not to believe in God.*'

* Since I gave this address, the latest Blasphemy prosecution has developed into a huge State advertisement for a particularly offensive man engaged, among his other activities, in a particularly offensive trade.

"Mr. Shaw indignantly objected to the position taken up by the Bench, and asked for the case to be adjourned until the next court."

"Captain Mitford : 'The case will be adjourned. We cannot believe the word of a man like that.' "*"

The attitude of Captain Mitford is the natural outcome of the general social atmosphere of disapproval of outspoken unbelief. Some at least here to-night have felt the weight of that disapproval either in their own persons or in that of their friends. The amount of life still left in the evil spirit of *De Haeretico Comburendo* varies greatly in different places and in different sets and in different families. On the whole it is strongest in the upper and middle classes of society. The poor have enough to do in coping with stern reality, and have no time to spend over quarrels on matters wholly immaterial to the needs and relations of daily life. The working classes take men as they are, and don't judge them by the label of their religion or non-religion. In that they set us all a good example, a good example I mean to us heretics as well as to our friends the orthodox. Labels are nothing. A man's a man for a' that. It does not matter what a man's label is, or a woman's either ; only if he spends his whole time thinking about other people's labels, and judging them thereby, does his very manhood become contaminated : he ceases to be a man, and becomes a clerical or anti-clerical.

The worst of the Roman Catholic Church is that, much more than in the case of other Churches, the excessive claims of her priesthood divide up the community into clerical and anti-clerical, with results destructive to the real spiritual life of a nation. If you are always plotting to get your neighbour cashiered because he does or does not go to Mass, your mind is obsessed with that mean and angry pre-occupation, and the

* I have inserted this since I gave this lecture to the *Heretics*. It occurred since then, but seems singularly apposite.

real things of the spiritual or of the social world are never seen. You live in a kingdom of the blind. I deprecate anything in this country leading to the state of things prevalent in France, with its never-ending pendulum-swing of clerical and anti-clerical reaction. But if we are not to be forced into anti-clericalism we must have our equal rights recognised, not only in the law of the land, but in the ordinary relations of society and of the family. Christians and non-Christians are mutually dependent, and we ought not to give up the other party as a bad job. We are ourselves gravely concerned in the growth or decrease of tolerance and sense in the Church. And so, too, is the Church concerned with us. We are members of one family. We live under one roof—England.

I deprecate the plea, however forcibly argued, that civilisation is "at the cross-roads," that it must turn either wholly Christian or wholly non-Christian. It is not going to do either. Civilisation is no longer an indivisible unit that must go down one of two paths. It was on one path in the middle ages, but now it is found on many paths. Diversity of religious experience and belief is the law of the future, and those who cry out that there is danger of our becoming wholly Christian or wholly anti-Christian, are unnecessarily perturbed. Christians and non-Christians will grow together to many harvests to come. It is only a question of how to get along together.

The growth of civilisation, setting free the individual, has brought into the European world a greater variety of religious temperaments than was thought possible in the days of Loyola, Calvin, Laud, or Voltaire. The number of these different temperaments will continue to increase, as the individual becomes evolved out of the tribe and the family. And opinions are not now as of old, geographically and racially segregated: they divide, and will more and more divide nations, classes, and households. Even if the number of Churches grows smaller by amalgamation, the number of temperaments and beliefs will increase.

These "varieties of religious experience" can, if we like, be grouped under two heads: the Christian and the non-Christian. But this division is not the most fundamental.

In a free country, where all religions were unprivileged and friendly to each other, it would fall more into the background, as it does already in small social groups where freedom and amity prevail. But, so long as religious freedom and equality are incomplete in their actual social working, so long this division must loom large. The Christians are the most numerous ; but the non-Christians (among whom are a large number of insincere Conformists) possess a great part of the intellectual power ; and, therefore, any decay in their moral character due to conventional hypocrisy on their part, is disastrous to human progress out of proportion to their numbers. On the Continent the question is : Can Christian and non-Christian be mutually tolerant, or will they grow up as enemies, each brought up to believe that virtue consists in hating the other side ? But in England the question is : Can they grow freely and openly side by side, or is the pretence that practically everyone is a believing Christian to be regarded as the rule in society ?

The English upper class to-day is cultured, but not intellectual. In a sense it will tolerate anything ; but it dislikes the active application of brain to fundamental questions. It submits to a system of intellectual repression, carried on, not by law, but by custom. The yoke is self-imposed : or at least those who bear it will not lift the necessary little finger to push it aside. Outward conformity to the Church of England is mildly asked by the clergy in the name of good-fellowship,* and thoughtlessly yielded by many who, in belief, are not true children of the

* An increasing number of the clergy, being truly religious, are beginning to take another and a better line. They no longer expect or wish us agnostics to come to their services, but they are more anxious to make friends with us in ordinary society and to pursue common causes. I have heard that many of the younger Christians, both lay and clerical, object to compulsory chapel at Cambridge.

Church, or who have never troubled to form any real beliefs, either negative or positive.

There are three classes of reasons given in excuse by unbelievers who attend Church, or by doubters who neglect to investigate their doubts and to act on the result of the enquiry. The three motives are the conventional, the altruistic, and the religious. I shall deal with them in that order.

I.

The conventional motive is the least confessed, but the most important with some, at any rate, of those who practise an insincere or a thoughtless conformity. The fear of seeming eccentric, the prime need to appear *comme il faut*, is often far stronger than the love of religious truth. This has been a characteristic of our upper class ever since the re-establishment of the Anglican Church in 1661 after Cromwell's Puritan rule. Then, when a large part of the middle and lower classes refused to obey the Clarendon Code, and preferred to suffer the persecutions of the Restoration *regime*, the Puritan gentry avoided their share of the proscription, and became Anglican. From that time we can date what Mr. Charles Booth calls the "strict and remarkable influence of class on religious observance in England." The tradition of religious solidarity in which the upper class has been born and bred for so many generations, has brought about some very ignoble results, which escape notice only because they are customary. Many of the best educated people regard religion as a matter of social practice.

Since there is no logical or moral argument to be advanced in favour of conformity for merely conventional reasons, I pass it over in silence, merely noting its immense power as a motive in our country. It appears, however, that it is resented by the younger generation of earnest Christians, which I take to be a most hopeful sign for the new age. But there are many Christians who are not of the younger generation and a great many who are not earnest, and among such the convention of expecting us to conform is still very strong.

II.

The second motive often urged for conformity is altruistic. Two things are to be considered,—the “lower orders” and the family.

The argument from the “lower orders” is based upon two assumptions: first, that only the highly educated can thrive without dogmatic religion, and, secondly, that, unless the upper and middle classes set the example, the rest will in fact cease to be practising Christians. There are rich people who, in logical accordance with this view, seldom attend church in London, where their presence, being unnoticed by the masses, would be of no sort of use. But in the country the same persons attend the village church, where the presence of the gentlefolk is noted, and their absence might be remarked.

The aristocratic Roman augurs used, for reasons of State and for the benefit of the multitude, to practise rites in the efficacy of which they themselves did not believe. No two augurs could meet without smiling. So, at least, we used to be told at school, as proof of the decadence of Rome. Yet by English standards there was nothing decadent about the business,—except the smiling.

The answer to the altruistic argument can be drawn from experience. It is said that the poorer classes will not be religious unless the upper classes set the example. Yet the most vital forms of religion among the working classes, whether Dissent, the Salvation Army, or the Church in the slums, are all quite independent of upper class example. Dissent, in the villages, has actually to struggle against the more or less veiled oppression of the parson and of the Church-goers, who are supposed to be propping up, by their example, the religion of the masses. In the towns, too, Dissent is the rival of upper-class religion: it is strongest among the well-to-do and serious-minded artisans and lower middle classes in the North. And the work of the Church in the slums is carried on in a spirit very different from that of snobbish imitation of upper class conventionality.

" 'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
 Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
 And the pale weaver, through his windows seen,
 In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.
 I met a preacher there I knew and said :
 ' Ill and o'er worked, how fare you in this scene ?'
 ' Bravely ! ' said he ; ' for I, of late, have been
 Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the living bread. ' "

From men like that, whether Churchmen or Dissenters, the working classes get religion, not from those who go to Church to " set a good example."

The true religions of the middle and lower classes will look after themselves, and would continue to thrive as before if the whole upper class (except a few clergy and their devoted helpers) turned publicly atheist to-morrow.

The idea that putting in an appearance at Church will help any one else to be truly religious, shows an entire misconception of the nature and value of real religion. The principal effect of the attendance of the rich at church is to maintain the notion that only the orthodox are respectable. Here lies a real social evil, which a little honesty would soon remove. It is most important for the people of every class, whether dependent or independent, to know that their " betters," if they have any, differ from each other in religious opinion. For real toleration is only brought about when people have got accustomed to the idea that the other side exists, and contains quite the average number of good people.

Although it would be bad if all dogmatic religion in the poorer classes were dependent on upper class patronage, it would be worse still if there were no Free Thought among them. Happily here, too, the people have helped themselves. Scepticism and secularism, both active and passive, is strong among them, and it is strongest among the most intelligent and altruistic of the artisans and lower middle class.

On the whole the working class, both Christian and non-Christian, never doubt the obvious truth that a man's or

woman's religious opinions matter very little provided they are honestly held. Whereas many of the upper class think exactly the opposite: they seem to think that a person's religious opinions are all-important, but that if he is an agnostic it is his social duty to be dishonest about it. There are some people who, if they want to find out about a man, go up first and smell his religious opinions, and if they don't like them turn away with a sniff of disgust. And, mind, there are anti-clericals as well as clericals who judge people in this ridiculous fashion.

So much for the class question. The second altruistic motive for insincere conformity is that which concerns the family. It is still sometimes supposed that religious unity can be preserved at least in the family. But members of the same family often differ in temperament, intellect, and emotional character. In other words, they are, by nature, of different religions. And if natural growth is denied, the individual, whether man or woman, is stunted in development. Happy is that family where all the members think alike—happy, but not always vigorous. Unhappy is the family whose members have given up thinking because they cannot think in unison.

It is not necessary that members of a family should be always intruding their views upon each other. The place where the propagandist should most usually be silent is his or her own domestic circle. But that rule must hold good on both sides; and such silence can only profitably follow when the position of the dissident has been made clear, and has been accepted by the others once for all. Family peace can be real, and affection unembittered only when toleration is complete; when the sense of disapproval does not haunt the dissident member; when character and honesty, as well as intellectual development, are not stunted by grossly unfair appeals to personal affections. Pain there must be somewhere, whenever there is movement. Christ said that He came to divide families; to bring not peace, but a sword. He said that people ought to leave their fathers and mothers and follow Him. Has truth a smaller claim in the twentieth century

than in the first? Luther caused, perhaps, more bitter misery than any other man in history. But if men and women had then refrained from becoming Protestant because they knew it would break the hearts of parents, sisters, and brothers, we should at this day be under the heel of the Mediæval Church. Reason, in Professor Bury's words, would still be "in chains," and morals, too, would be mediæval. And if the various issues to-day are indeed less definite, less important, than those of the Reformation Dawn, neither is the price to be paid so heavy. Parental affection is now seldom haunted by the belief that fiery hell gapes for the loved but unbelieving child. In fact, what is wanted to remove much of the misery caused by avowals of agnosticism is simply more frequent avowals. Custom makes it a property of easiness. As Samuel Butler said in *The Way of All Flesh* :

"If people would dare to speak to one another unreservedly, there would be a good deal less sorrow in the world a hundred years hence."

Already in this generation there is less sorrow, but only because there was plain and painful speaking in the time of Darwin. It is, therefore, a mistake to suppose that new ideas "filter through" if they are not expressed, or that the religious grow accustomed to agnosticism by seeing agnostics go to Church.

There are in the present generation, chiefly for want of plain speaking in the past, some quite old people who would suffer so much pain at the discovery that the young people whom they love have become agnostics, that concealment from them is, perhaps, in some cases, right. But there are strict limits, even in such cases. Concealment from old people must not involve telling lies; or concealment from equals in age and from the world of one's daily life; and, above all, it must not involve the concealer in putting fetters on his or her choice of companionship, reading, or intellectual and moral development. Now these conditions can seldom, I think, be fulfilled in the case when the younger person has to live perpetually in the same house with the old person from whom the facts

are to be concealed. In that case concealment is nearly always wrong.

The character of Christianity gains when it is kept in kindly contact with non-Christianity. The Christian may gain in breadth of view from his agnostic friends, just as the agnostic who is intimate with Christians runs less risk of contracting cynicism, and hardness of tone. This is a question of personal experience; but I think that most people who have seen the experiment made will agree. The terrible narrowness of the monopolist Christianity of sixty years ago has in many instances been improved away by contact with heretics, even in the case of people who believe as much as their grandfathers. But the healing process is very far from complete, because agnosticism is so little outspoken. Christianity and Agnosticism may be regarded as engaged perpetually *in a work of mutual rescue*. But this is only possible where there is equality and openness.

In close connection with the argument from the family is the argument about women. The man may often stay away from Church, even in the country, provided he pretends that it is because he is lazy; but it is too often regarded as "bad form" for women to be absent. This insult to women is sometimes excused on the ground that "women can't do without religion." If this saying means that no woman can lead a good or happy life without the Christian religion, it is disproved by countless examples. But, perhaps, it means that they care more about religious questions and are more emotional than men. Now, if psychology has proved the existence of a more emotional temperament in women (a point on which I have heard different opinions stated) we could only deduce that indifferentism and hypocrisy come less naturally to women than to their brothers; and we should therefore see an even greater wrong in the purely conventional conformity expected of them by family and social custom. Further, their emotional and poetical temperaments (if such they have) would do much to save Free Thought from the hardness that often besets the virile reaction against sentimentality. Therefore, to shut up women in a charmed circle of Christian dogmatics, would

be no less injurious to the progress of the world than to place similar restrictions upon men.

But whether woman's temperament be more or less emotional than man's, it is certain that to send man out to cultivate the unreclaimed lands of Free Thought without his mate is to ensure disaster for the human race. There is a type of man, even more common on the Continent than in England, who, himself a disbeliever, likes his womenkind to believe. He holds that virtue is more important to women than to men, and that women should therefore be Christians in order to be virtuous. It is only people who have themselves no desire for virtue who can hold such doctrines. For, in fact, morality and intellect are the two deities that preside over the human soul : it is not necessary that they should in every case be of equal stature, but it is necessary that neither should be deliberately mutilated to give life to the other. If intellect is sacrificed on the shrine of morality, morality itself becomes a Moloch, and loses its own virtue.

The altruistic arguments for conformity, alike as regards the poorer classes and as regards women and children, are based on the assumption that belief in a personal God is what makes people good—the view so forcibly expressed the other day by Captain Mitford (see page 4 above). But it is the way in which opinions are held that affects conduct more than the opinions themselves ; and no opinion can be held in a right way if it has been forced on a person who is not naturally disposed to believe it.

In one sense, however, views about God have, perhaps, some effect on conduct. If people are brought up to suppose that the only reason for not lying and stealing is that God sees them, when they come to doubt the actuality of God's presence they will, perhaps, be more likely to lie and steal. The time of life when faith in a personal God is most often shaken corresponds to the age when temptation of all sorts is strongest and freshest to men and women, the time when life is new and untried before experience or routine have given safety. Just at that time the old beliefs are likely to be breaking up. But, fortunately, in many cases there are other

motives for morality at work besides cosmological creeds. The fear of the better aspects of public opinion is a deterrent much more real and effective with most people than the fear of God, and not really less noble. But the instinct towards morality is the noblest and the most effective motive of all. At the ultimate moment of choice we feel that right is right, and wrong, wrong. This fundamental instinct, whether naked or draped in the form of a creed, alone saves the world,—so far as it is saved. This firm foundation of moral instinct is endangered by those who dig under it, striving to make it rest on a cosmological system, of which millions, even of Christians, are not at heart perfectly and constantly sure. If you tell people that they have no choice but to be wicked or to be Christian, they cannot always choose the latter. That alone is a sufficient argument against insincere conformity, aimed at keeping others moral through religion. The argument from the policeman is turned, for whatever it is worth, against those who first employed it. *In so far as* the break-up of faith means the break-up of morals (and it is not very much so) the scandal lies at the door of those Christians who bring children up to think that the only reason for being good is that God or Christ ordains it.

III.

Besides the conventional and the altruistic, there is also a religious motive for conformity by unbelievers. Here, where we enter into the region of intimate personal feelings, the subject becomes more complex, and generalisations are more dangerous. It would be absurd to condemn under one head all the various cases of conformity of unbelievers prompted by emotional or religious feeling. The workings of the soul are more secret, and are entitled to more respect, than conventionality or false ideas of social service. But I may be permitted to point out what appear to me the fallacies and shortcomings of much contemporary thought and practice in this matter.

The crudest form of the religious argument is: that Christianity offers the only alternative to a materialistic outlook on everything. This is in the first place irrelevant, and in the second place false.

It is irrelevant, because, if materialism were true, and if the loss of Christianity led straight to materialism, the loss of Christianity would lead straight to truth. Now, it is important that people should know what is true, whatever the truth may be. We could not alter the nature of the Universe by conceiving it to be other than that which it is. But we might get a wrong basis for ethics by reason of mistaken beliefs.

In the second place, it is false that the loss of Christianity involves the adoption of materialism. If you disbelieve Christianity, you are not forced to believe that nothing but matter exists. The spiritual nature of the universe, the relation of mind to matter, the emotional capabilities of Man, the spiritual content of the world in which he finds himself, are not to be affected by the belief that Christ was born of human parents, or that there is no personal God. Only minds very strictly brought up in certain opinions feel their faith in the spiritual nature of things to be dependent on their faith in the supernatural. Indeed, it is greatly to belittle the mysterious and divine nature of man to say that humanity could not have produced Jesus Christ. The seat of the wonders can be moved from the next world to this, from an unknown God to our brothers whom we know. The lives and writings of half the great men of the last hundred years do not seem to warrant the conclusion that agnosticism or unbelief closes the gates of the imagination and the soul.

Indeed, how should such a thing be? The vast, unexplored fields of thought and poetry are not all closed up to us if one noble legend is found to be a legend—no more, and no less. The “splendours and terrors” never cease to rise from the unplumbed depths of our own minds, until we ourselves have yielded up the life of the spirit to the pressing cares and vulgarities and amusements of daily life; and no one is more liable to this fate than one wrapped up in comfortable and conventional orthodoxy. Has our life ceased to be worth

living because we no longer say we know its origin and its end? Must love decay on Earth because Hell is quenched, or pity because suffering here is without personal compensation hereafter, or energy because mankind can only be saved by its own effort? Is the good worth fighting for only if we are certain beforehand of conquest? Dare we serve only under a banner predestined to victory, and under an omnipotent general? The imagination should be used to illumine and spiritualise what is, and to picture forth what is not, but never to preach that which is not as though it were.

Another less crude form of the religious argument for conformity on the part of an unbeliever runs somewhat as follows:—"True that there may really be a spiritual side to the universe of the unorthodox, and that it can be conceived by imaginative heretics; but, for my part, I want a common worship, and a religious atmosphere." You cannot provide me with a religious atmosphere, still less with religious ceremonies: therefore, I will go into Church with people whose faith I do not share, and pray on my knees to a God in whose separate personality I have no real belief. For I come out of Church feeling happier."

There is, of course, no absolute and universally valid argument against this plea, because it is personal, and no one can see inside the soul of any other man. But we may, without offence, urge such a person to examine very closely the moral quality of his spiritual satisfaction, if he obtains it by centreing the life of his soul round ceremonies which are intended to represent dogmas and doctrines incredible to his intellect. He alone can judge his conduct in such a matter. But in judging, let him remember that intellectual honesty is the chastity of the soul, the salt of the whole moral being of man. If, judged by such standards, he can still think that there is no higher religious life open to him than that which centres round the ceremonies of faiths incredible to him, then there is no more to be said. He alone is judge. But I think that many people let themselves down too easily in

this matter, and, consequently, fail to develop to its fullest the noble side of their nature.*

I cannot help feeling that the agnostic who, in order to enjoy the atmosphere of religious emotion, sends his soul to worship where his mind cannot follow, is selling his own birth-right for a mess of other people's spiritual pottage. He signs a one-sided treaty of union with the vast majority, who have no more need of his companionship than the rich man had of the poor man's ewe lamb, and rejects the comradeship of those who are "voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone." If they often founder there, it is for want of help. The loneliness of the frankly unorthodox position is to many men and women really its most serious disadvantage. It could be remedied at once if all real agnostics and unbelievers revealed themselves to each other. And they can only reveal themselves to each other by revealing themselves also to society. In the great task of the future—moral endeavour without supernatural aid—the atmosphere of brotherhood as yet exists only in a few circles, and too often is not present to encourage the

* To prevent misunderstanding I should like to add this to what I said in the lecture : I do not mean that a person is to be blamed *ipso facto* if he attends the service of a religion in which he does not believe. I attend Christian marriages and funerals, provided I do not have to do so as bridegroom or corpse, and have no quarrel with others who choose to go further in the direction of "occasional conformity." My objection is made against

(1) Those who conceal their heretical opinions from the society in which they ordinarily live ; if Church-going is a part of this deception I think it wrong :

(2) Those who try to make their spiritual life centre round rituals expressive of doctrines they do not believe.

Of course, I recognise a distinction between these two classes. No. (1) seems to me an obvious social crime. No. (2) is a personal matter and is much more difficult to define and to appreciate in all the subtleties of each individual case.

lonely one whose lot is cast in uncongenial surroundings. But if some of us in this generation will stand alone, the agnostics of the next generation will not be so lonely. And we ourselves, if we stand upright, shall see each other. That is why I welcome a society like the Cambridge Heretics. Our real social duty in religion is to our brother and sister agnostics, who have need of us, and not to the great self-sufficient majority who hold other faiths, with all their churches and rituals, their principalities and powers.

The man, says Leslie Stephen, who would abandon the old doctrine :

“must find sufficient comfort in the consciousness that he is dealing honestly with his intellect ; he must be able to dispense with the old consolations of Heaven and Hell ; he must be content to admit explicitly that the ancient secret has not been revealed, and to hold that people will be able to get on somehow or other, even if the most ignorant and stupid cease to consider it a solemn duty to dogmatise with the utmost confidence upon matters of which the wisest know absolutely nothing, and never expect to know anything. Undoubtedly, this is to accept a position from which many people will shrink ; and it is pleasanter to the ordinary mind to reject it summarily as untenable, or to run up some temporary refuge of fine phrases, and try to believe in its permanence. I only say that I do not see how an honest dissenter from the orthodox opinions can act otherwise.”*

Words such as these, spoken by such a man as Leslie Stephen, lift us at once into a moral and religious atmosphere more inspiring to noble life than vague excuses or calls for religious anæsthetics. You may say that some agnostics do not understand the misery of life, and the consequent desire

* *The Religion of Sensible Men*, an essay printed at the end of the *Agnostic's Apology* (price 6d.). Rationalist Press Association (page 139).

for these anæsthetics. Leslie Stephen understood all; he knew the desire well, but he restrained the craving, because he could not satisfy it without dishonesty. Here is a kind of Puritanism, much needed by our more luxurious generation, which too often conceives of religion as it does of the theatre, as a means of escaping pain, and enjoying the little pleasures of sentimentalism.

But there are many other agnostic temperaments and religions, in which joy shines more brightly than it did in the mind of the Mountaineer,—such a temperament, for instance, as that of his friend, Meredith. Many minds, again, are more purely scientific and less emotional, less open either to joy or sorrow on speculative grounds; but they are not, therefore, the less devoted servants of humanity and righteousness. Outside our Father's house are many mansions.

We may, then, conclude that, in this age and country, religious conformity is generally more comfortable in the world, and sometimes also at home; and that, to some heretics, while conformity cuts them off from all the great spiritual passions, it brings in return certain mild sentimental satisfactions. But the question is, not whether it is comfortable, but whether in their case it is right. It is a moral issue. In the coming generations, a large proportion of the natural leaders of thought, literature, science, and public life, will be extremely doubtful in their dogmatic beliefs. Will they be honest or dishonest? Will they take their own convictions seriously? On the answer to that question will in some measure depend the intellectual and moral fate of this country in the next few centuries. It will affect other spheres besides religion; for the moral earnestness of the strongest intellects has, by a thousand different and indirect channels, a preponderating influence upon all spheres of life. For one thing, genius seldom spreads its wings off the shoulders of a hypocrite. In politics, where the character of public men is everything to the nation—in journalism, literature, and art, with their thousand temptations to sell yourself,—in the life of trade and commerce with its thousand moral problems,—the man who has played with his religious

beliefs is much more likely to choose the primrose path in the other spheres of his life. The men who produce an effect on the world are not those who know the truth, but those who have the courage of their opinions. Truth is great ; but it is earnestness that prevails.

True opinions do not spread always, and of their own force ; but sometimes, and only by dint of courageous avowal. The opinions of Darwin and Huxley have filtered through, some of them as far as the pulpit. But those men and their followers did not produce their effect by concealing their incredulity about Genesis and the Gardarene swine. That battle is now largely won. But some of us think that there is no difference between the Gadarene swine and the whole supernatural system. This opinion is not at all likely to be universally accepted, because the largest part of mankind evidently has an inherent love of the supernatural. From that some of our Christian friends argue :—

- (1) That we also have the same inherent craving for the supernatural ; and
- (2) That we ought at once to gratify it.

But,

- (1) I know that I have no such craving ;
- (2) I think that there is nothing that present-day England requires, intellectually and spiritually, more than a little healthy anti-supernaturalism.

Anti-supernaturalism is not the same as materialism of temperament, or blindness to the spiritual.

What, then, are we to aim at as our ideal ? Shall we try to create a society composed one half of sincere Christians and the other half of make-believe Christians, relieved by a few enraged anti-clericals stung to fury by the insincerity around them ? Should we not rather aim at a society of sincere Christians and sincere heretics, living in friendly social intercourse with each other, working together for the innumerable objects that good men have in common and sharing together not a few spiritual emotions. The question concerns Christians

and non-Christians alike, for, whether we know it or not, we are one body, and we flourish not at each other's expense, but by a system of wholesome rivalry and mutual reaction that can be actively friendly in its workings. Christians and non-Christians are no more "natural enemies" than English and French, or English and Germans. But each side must admit the other's right to a "place in the sun." It is to be hoped that the Twentieth Century may see the growth of Norman-Angellism in religion, and the disappearance of the last relics of our bad inheritance from the Middle Ages, the spirit that once took form in the statute of *De Haeretico Comburendo*.

[A portion of this address was printed a few years ago
in a magazine.]



F-240/617

OTOMOUNT
PHLET BINDER
PAT. NO.
877188
Manufactured by
ORD BROS. Inc.
racuse, N. Y.
ockton, Calif.

1597098
an
haeretico comburendo
Bindery cat. 1945

BL
2780
.T8

TREVELYAN
De haeretico co

MAY 20 1945

1597098
Bindery

BL 2780
.T8

1597098

SWIFT MAIL 1000 030